

# 2006-10-08 Right Intention

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

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As a topic for this morning's talk, I wanted to continue with the topic from Friday which most of you weren't there, which is right intention or right resolve or right. Thinking right attitude, which is the second of the Eightfold Path, eightfold path is the primary or the most common way the Buddha talked about the spiritual path that he was offering. And so there's eight elements to this path. And the second one is called usually translated into English is right intention. But sometimes you'll see in English translators right resolve or right thinking. And, you know, in that, if you see Buddhism as a path, then a path is something you need to walk. So you don't walk a path by reading books. You don't walk a path by wishful thinking, we walk a path by something you do, you have to engage and just get out there and walk, you go through code, you have to longreach preserve and go for the walk up there. And yes, it requires something of you to do the walk and ends. So in the same way, the path of practice that Buddhist Buddha taught requires something of us, it'd be nice if it didn't require anything of us. That'd be very convenient. save a lot of time. And, but it requires something of us. And so no one else can do the walk for you. You have to kind of somehow engage in it yourself. And there's a few different elements that are needed to that walk. And one element needed is to know what the path is about and know what the goal of the path is about and know what are the what's the proper orientation or proper frame of reference for finding the path and being on the path. And so having the wisdom to find the path is the first of these eight elements which is right view. And the way it's often described as that has to do with understanding the Four Noble Truths. So it's, if the goal of Buddhism is to be free is liberation. And liberation is not some vague idea of this kind of exalted state that no one quite understands what it is. liberation is very particularly stated as being liberation from suffering and all the internal conditions and causes for suffering to the clinging, the attachment, the ways in which the heart is held, constrained in bondage, so to liberate the heart to liberate the mind. And so if that's the goal, then the Four Noble Truths are meant to be the simplest, most direct way of finding the path. Given, that's the goal. And so they say the simplest way to getting there is to find the path, then you start sort of tuning into that level of your experience that is suffering. Now, some of that some people, it comes easy to do that, to notice their suffering. And for some people, they thought it not a, not a

tendency to look at suffering, because it's kind of bad news. And there's, but in order for there to find the path to liberation, which liberation from suffering, you have to become sensitive to suffering, your own suffering particular. And, but it's not supposed to be kind of a, you know, cosmic downer to look if you're suffering. It's supposed to be the beginning of a cure. And so you look at yourself and get sensitive to seek me get an understanding for yourself, some of the causes and conditions that that prompt your suffering to be there. And once you understand how what you contribute to that suffering, in terms of clinging and grasping, then it's possible to release that and find the bridge Freedom versus the cessation of suffering. So that's the first noble truth. Therefore the first of the Eightfold Path. The second step, which is today is right resolve or right intention. And that is that when you want to walk a path, you also it's helpful usually to have a good attitude, you're going to walk a path. Depending on the nature of the path, if it's going to be really difficult, mountainous path and you have to go from the high Sierras. It's best to have a certain kind of attitude of care and mindfulness and, and wherewithal when you do that, so you don't just go casually out with like t shirts in the high Sierras. And don't pay attention to the weather. You know, you have to kind of, you know, be aware of your environment, what's going on the weather and what you brought with you and a certain kind of care needs to go into that kind of hike. Different kinds of hikes, different kind of paths require different things from us. If you go for a hike with kids with children, not only need to be very aware of the environment. But you also probably have small kids. There has to be a lot of wisdom about how to get them to going. One of the wisdom is you don't go for a long hike. You take short hikes really short. And you don't, you don't. There's there certain kind of attitudes by that hike that you might work for you and you hike that you don't want to have for the children like, it doesn't really help have competitive hiking with kids, or, you know, really determines a really great goal orientation, we're going to get, you know, usually you kind of want to be more leisurely, you're gonna hear them more leisurely. And, you know, realize that for the kid that's stopping and looking at the banana slug is probably the most important part of the day. And so, you know, you have to enter that path but with a lot of patience, a lot of presence. You want to avoid cruelty with a kid You would have been ill well How could you look at one more dentists like you know, you kind of go with an attitude that this is what this is what that path is about is you're going to go and kind of so important, I'm trying to say here depending on on their circumstances, we sometimes adjust our, our attitude, and different attitudes are needed in different circumstances. It's quite natural, it's a normal thing, in different endeavors, we have different attitudes or are called for. So, in the same way, if you want to do the Buddhist path, the Eightfold Path, it requires a certain attitude, certain intentionality or certain resolve a way of doing attitude. And, and if I say that, I could well imagine if you said without this kind of careful preamble leading up to this, people say, you know, I just said Oh, you need to have a good attitude, right attitude. People say, Oh, you know, religion again, that kind of like Forcing some kind of way of being. And I just don't want to be any particular way I want to be free in here religious telling, you have to be a certain way, you know, I'm going to find another religion that's kind of it can be really be free, don't be told how to be. And, and you know the goal is to be free. But if you want to be free, it helps to have certain kind of attitudes or some attitudes that you have don't help that freedom. And some attitudes do help. And so if you if you kind of naturally know what the terrain is, what the attitudes are, that are helpful, then hopefully it's not an imposition. But rather, it's something that you're inspired to do. And part of the work you have to do

and walking the path is taking responsibility for the path is also take responsibility for the attitude you bring. And one of the ways that I understand the second step, the right resolve, for right to tension, right thought is that it's kind of like a minimal thing in the middle, minimal attitude. We want to try to develop Look, in order to walk the path doesn't it doesn't mean that we have to do it really well. But what it means is, is that we have to try to work in this direction towards this. Another way of saying it is a part of the path is leading take some responsibility for attitude for the motivations and the orientation that we have in our disposition, and our disposition maybe isn't so amenable to adjustment. But wanting to come with a new attitude is quite powerful even just wanting to can make a difference, let alone data so you can can't really do much because you're so grumpy. But even wanting to be kinder can make a difference because then you should I choose to act in different ways. So I think this is just one here is that this is kind of where we begin to look at how we can change ourselves and without summit attempt to change ourselves or attitude Least, maybe there's no path. Otherwise, it's just like, Oh, you know, it's kind of wishful thinking or magical thinking, Oh, if I just kind of do this meditation practice and do these different things through some teachers, and I don't really try to change myself, then one day, I'll wake up and I'll be changed. I'll be liberated. And that's magical thinking, right? You have to take some responsibility for that change. And so, how are we going to change ourselves? That's the question and how are we going to change yourself in a way that's deeply respectful for ourselves? It's not an imposition, but rather feels like this is feels right to you know, feel seen if you want to do it. Like the example I gave. I'm sorry for these kids examples on Friday. But that's what's on my mind these days. You know, you know, if you go into you know, as a stockbroker, you know, the attitude a stockbroker brings in the stockbroker stock market floor. is probably a very different attitude that you would bring if she you know, during lunch breaks, she goes down the street to the daycare where a kid is and walks into the daycare. It's a very different attitude, right? You know, I hope and, and so you know, loser kind of loses it's appropriate to just take response and take responsibility for that. Here's a story. When I was 13 my family would send me up to the mountains around the monastery to collect edible plants to be used for evening meal. This foraging trip was the only work that I really enjoyed. Otherwise, I tried every trick I could to avoid work on my family's farm. I was still going to school but school had no interest for In my anger was a welcomed barrier to learning anything the teacher was teaching. Occasionally during my forging trips, I would pass the monastery while the monks were out and about sweeping the leaves from the many path pathways. The first time I saw the monks working, I was mesmerized in watching them going about their work. For many months after I would often stop for a while to watch them sweep. They went about their work silently, and within efficiency that seemed effortless. One day, a monk walked up to me and asked what I was doing in the mountains. Immediately, I became defensive and scared. I resented anyone who tried to get to know me. So instead of answering the question, I countered by asking what he was doing. The monk smiled and answered that he had been told to sweep And then he was just killing the time until he can return to his room for now. As I walked home later in the day, I thought about his answer, and was glad that he didn't seem any different than me. When I required when I was required to do anything, my heart was never in it. And my attitude was that I was passing time until I could be excused. taking a nap was certainly preferable. The next time I passed the monastery on one of my foraging trips, another monk stopped his sweeping and also asked what I was doing. Again, I resented at the question, it felt like an

intrusion. However, this time, this time, I did not feel as scared. Again, I deflected the question by asking what he was doing. He answered that he was doing extra work. in hopes of being assigned to the kitchen, which was warm in the winter, and always seem to have one or two extra sweet rice cakes in the cupboard for the cooks to nibble on. Without saying anything, I nodded and left to continue my foraging. The monks answer resonated with me since I too like to be warm in eating rice cakes was one of my favorite activities second only to sleeping. The next time I passed the monastery, a third monk asked me the same question this time. I this time I was surprised that I wasn't defensive or resentful of being asked. However, again I deflected the question back to him. He explained that he was sweeping as a spiritual discipline to help him overcome his anger. Later as I walked at the mountain trail, with my bag of plants, I felt they kinship with this monk, like me, he had anger. But I was perplexed that he would want to overcome it. For me, my anger protected me. A week later, I was again outside the monastery watching the monks sweep. Yet another monk came up to me. When he asked me what I was doing, I mumbled something about collecting plants. I doubt he could hear me my voice was so faint. But I didn't muster up some strength to ask him what he was doing. He replied he was beautifying the monastery, so that others may be inspired in their work of spiritual transformation. Before I left him, I glanced down the wellspect paths to realize that part of the reason I was compelled to watch the monk sweep was it they seem to be transforming the path to something that made me feel peaceful The next time I stood outside the monastery watching the monks, I was drawn to walk over to a fifth monk. And before he could ask me what I was doing, I asked, he looked at me with kind eyes. And after what seemed like a long but quite soft silence, he explained that he was sweeping to be of service to all the use the monastery. In practicing this way, he hoped to find the ultimate peace. As I left the monastery that they I thought his answer strange, because I didn't understand what he meant by service and by peace. I certainly couldn't see how these had any value for me. The next time I visited the monastery was the last time I had an unfamiliar feeling as I walked up into the mountains. Just before I reach the monastery, I guessed that I was looking forward to seeing the monks again. felt a warm glow of gladness in anticipation of what I would find. When I arrived at the monastery, I walked right up to an old monk, who seemed absorbed in a sweeping. I inquired what he was doing. As he answered, each of his words washed over me, like cleansing water. He said, me, I'm not doing anything at all. My ego was swept away long ago. There's no I that does anything. Now the Awakened Life moves through my body, my heart, my mind, and my mouth. No one sweeps there are no paths to sweep and there's no dirt to brush away. I was stunned by his answer. And before I could respond, he handed me the broom and walked away. I have been here ever since. So each of the monks that he meets has a different attitude about the work that he's doing. And they're all doing the same work. So it's kind of interesting that the same activity can be, you know, can be used the same same kind of work can be the same kind of activity can call for have different attitudes or intentions or motivations behind it. So, you might think about that, that the life that you live, the work that you do, the activities you're involved in, what's the attitude, what's the intention, what's the disposition you have, in doing that work doing that activity and if there are multiple options for how you approach anything, what is the approach you have, the optimal one is the one that really is what you want, you want to express the way to live. And if you have to do something anyway, then try to kind of find sincerely inside of you the very best attitude intentionality that you would like to express in

network. Because the, in the long term, how you're going to be transformed and changed is not by the activity you do as much as the motivation, intention, the disposition that's behind what you do. So if you do things with kindness, then kindness is the result. The kindness becomes a disposition. If you do things with hate, hate becomes a disposition. One of the things that Buddha taught, as many people say the same similar thing he said, Whatever you think and ponder Upon frequently, that becomes the inclination of the mind. Many people, I think, never give any thought to where their mind mostly goes, will kind of where their thoughts mostly go and kind of the common themes. But to actually look at the common themes, what the mind does, and to realize that we're creating deep tracks in the mind if we keep doing the same thing over and over again. And it's possible to create new tracks, so becomes easier and easier for the mind over time to go in other directions, directions we prefer. It's very, very easy to have deep tracks of anger. And, and that's useful when you fall into the anger almost automatically. It's also possible to have deep tracks of kindness and so we fall into the kindness almost automatically. And part of the reason there's deep tracks is because of the repetition, the frequency in which we do things. And, and behind the thing that's most important for these tracks is our disposition, our intention in terms of the Buddhist path The eightfold path, there are three general attitudes or intentions, resolve, dispositions, which are said to be counter indicated, that go against work against the very attempt to become free. One of the first is cruelty. You know, if this is an attitude of cruelty, this position of cruelty, just flies in the face of trying to become free to be liberated, to be released. And so, if you want to walk the Buddhist path, you have to somehow not somehow overcome or began lessening, working against working to overcome the forces of cruelty inside of you seem kind of obvious. You know, if you want to be free, the suggestion I have is just like is that cruelty is a really a symptom, an expression of a lack of freedom. And so just if we want freedom has to somehow work with this one. So that's really obvious. A little bit less obvious, is, ill will, that if we want to become free, we have to overcome the dispositions, the attitudes of ill will, that we might carry with us will is a lighter thing you will it means you kind of have a version of some feeling of ill will towards something, but you're not actually engaged in thoughts of cruelty. You know, really wishing the person bad just don't like the person. And so, you know, so, ill will has to somehow be overcome. And the third is a little bit harder to understand. With the third is you have to we have to overcome the, the, the clinging or craving for essential desire And sexual desire can can be innocent. But sensual desire can also be far from innocent. And you know, and for people who are basically how to say this. There are plenty of people in our society for whom sensual desire, one form rather, is a source of tremendous suffering. Some people die because of it. And people make huge mistakes, tremendous suffering for others and for themselves by the drive to have sexual pleasure. And so we look at kind of the big addictions, it's very clear that when we're addicted, that somehow we are free. And so if we weren't what we would do is become free. We have one way or other have to overcome the forces the tracks of addiction to sensual pleasure. So there's a whole grade from you know, this very strong word addiction to mild and milder forms of clinging and craving to sensual, sensual desire. And any kind of craving a claim of sensual desire is a symptom of lack of freedom. It doesn't mean that we give up sensual pleasure when we give up the clinging to sensual desire, but without the releasing of sensual, clinging to sensual desires, you know, there's you know, we have to release some of it, we have to kind of begin to loosening that clinging, if we want to do is to become free. So, those three things are



said to be incompatible with the path, cruelty, ill will and sensual desire of some kind, essential desire that clinging or craving as part of it. So the right resolve that's such a Wrong resolve or wrong intention to have those three and the right resolve, right intention, right disposition is the opposite of those. So is the lack of cruelty, lack of ill will and lack of Central desire. And that's how to word it. it's worded in the text is lack of those three things, the absence of those three things. And some people kind of chat with a bit because they say, Well, you know, that's kind of negative, there should be a positive attitude, positive attention, not just the absence of something. And in fact, over and over again, commentators on this will say that in ancient language of the Buddha, the negative prefix, you know, the word letter A, and Pali with negative one says the absence of something implies the opposite, positive versions of that. So the absence of cruelty is the presence of compassion. The absence of ill will and Twice the presence of loving kindness. And the absence of disclaiming essential desire implies the presence of what's called translate usually is renunciation, letting go. And the However, before we quickly run talking about the positive ones, because then people feel good, right? And I can, I can feel it myself as a teacher, sometimes a force within me to try to please everybody, please all of you, somehow, and just talk about the positive stuff. You know, tell yourself just talk about compassion, get kind of mushy. And before we Russians, you don't want to rush there. We'll figure out how we get there. But I think part of the value of standing in the negative is is actually sometimes easier to accomplish the absence than it is to accomplish the presence. So maybe we can't kind of evoke an attitude of compassion. But we can perhaps put to rest or kind of overcome or not to act on the dispositions of cruelty. So it's kind of it kind of take it to the compassion level is jumping too far maybe has to go in small steps. It's a big thing just to be able to kind of drop the cruelty thing. And then kind of just be kind of not have that operating. But there is this positive side each of these three, so there's compassion, loving kindness, and oddly enough renunciation is considered the positive side of sexual desire. That requires some explaining. Because most people will think that renunciation is a deprivation. We have a strong association of the organization many people do with asceticism and self denial and some kind of way. The clearly the implications in the Buddhist teaching in the Pali word and Kama, which is a little bit different using these different meaning associations in the English word renunciation, clearly the meaning is visit letting go is a kind of turning away from something the ill will, the central desire and letting there's a kind of letting go. But the emphasis not so much on what you're letting go of, or the emphasis is as much as what you're letting go of, as it is, what is gained. And that's often not easily understood. And we talked for the negotiation, we think we say, in relation to the probation, but it's also the other hand, the other side of letting go, is something is what happens when we let go, we let go into something. There's something that's gained. And what's gained is a sense of happiness, a sense of joy. That's what's supposed to happen. And one of the functions of meditation practice in Buddhism is to provide a sense of happiness and sense of well being a sense of inner peace that becomes palpable becomes closer to him. Who's available if you recognize their that's their, that, that when you get caught up in sexual desire for example, you realize that if you let go of that sexual desire, you get to come back to that sense of well being and peace that is so strong, so wonderful. If you're asked to let go of Central desire and letting go means you go into kind of blah, into nothing, why would you want to let go of it? Central's can be pretty good sometimes, you know, even just fantasizing about being good can be good, you know, temporarily seems to be good. But if you if you know that letting

go of it, you're getting something better. A sense of peace, a sense of happiness as a well being sense of integrity, then it's easier to let go. So the realization part implies the game of something. And part of the function of meditation and other things is to give you teach you or show you the green of well being and happiness that are so satisfying. You want it to be more part of your life, more regular thing there. And so you're willing to let go of things that stand in the way of that make sense? So then, so then so then so then part of the right the right intention is beginning to cultivate an attitude of letting go of that attract that you've been looking at, what can I go off here? what's useful to let go in this situation? How can I let go, it's like a muscle that you can learn. And the better you learn using that muscle letting go, hopefully the wiser you are using it, you can let go unwisely. But there is the fact that it can be done unwisely doesn't mean that there isn't appropriate and wise ways of letting go. And then also to to arouse within us ourselves. Cultivate within us an attitude of loving kindness, of kindness or friendliness, of caring. Great question. And if you're wondering what to do with what, you know what what's going on, you can ask, Is this kind, am I being kind, that kind of changes the, the way in which you're looking at situations, sometimes quite dramatically. This is kind of cultivated kindness. Now kindness can be, can be done in wrong ways. You can be kind of inappropriate ways boys are not helpful. I've learned that with my kids, that I thought I was just being kind but sometimes kindness was not recalled and called for because my, my interpretation of kindness was to say yes. And that, you know, that's what you do with your time you say yes. And I've learned that you can say yes, all the time to kids. It's just bad news. So you have this cart, kindly say no. Are you realizing the bigger picture? The kind thing to say is no, given the bigger picture? So, but you know, to have that as a kind of as a habit, you know, is this kind of where's the kindness this situation? How can I be kind here? And then do it wisely? And then the last is compassion. Where's the compassion here? What's the basis of compassion, to cultivate compassion to look at compassion, think about compassion. regularly, when I read the newspaper, I have seen lots of occasions for compassion. And I tried to kind of use and use paper as a place for compassion practice. I was very moved today when I read the story of you know, this man who killed those Amish girls. And so his funeral like this was yesterday. And I don't give a numbers it was a lot of people came to a funeral, but half the people who came to this funeral with the Amish and they came because of the forgiveness practice. That's something so that gave me that wasn't exactly compassion. But, but that, you know, I think, for me, I mean, but but the newest compassionate side of the Amish to kind of go to his funeral, given even given what he's done. So they have that ability, that capacity is quite something. And in my mind is speaks very well the spiritual practice training of the Amish. And in the Amish, definitely they represent someone whose whole life as a kind of spiritual training, kind of like a monastery in its own right. So what do you know so we can make our life a monastery, we can make our life something we begin trying to make it different, transform ourselves and change for ourselves by regularly making a habit of coming back. It's like, what's my attitude here? Is this the attitude I really want to have? Is this disposition? What's my disposition here? Is this a disposition I really want to have? There are times where you'll discover that you have dispositions or attitudes that you don't want to have that you don't like. Might that might be the time it's really important to remember to be kind and compassionate, so that you don't bury yourselves with further hostility or anger or criticism for how you're feeling towards yourself. Oh, you know, I'm so terrible because I'm angry. Meet yourself. You know, sometimes there's situations where

most hostile and most cruel. That's often the times we need the most kindness, most compassion, self compassion, self kindness. It's hard to do because sometimes it's the very lack of it, which is maybe sometimes the, the fuel for the very hostility. So right resolve your right attention. The second of the Eightfold Path involves beginning to take responsibility for our attitude, our intention, our disposition, how we're thinking about things, and it's not an easy thing to do, but without beginning that and you're not going to, you know, it's not you have to begin somewhere. And hopefully, as you get into it and do it, it's something that you find deeply meaningful and enjoyable. So one more story from this magic monastery. Two young men happen to enter the monastery on the same day. One was an overconfident aristocrat who entered the monastery with a sense of entitlement. The other was a son of local farmers, who spent his life helping on the small poor family farm. During their entrance interview, the abbot asked them why they were becoming monks. The aristocrat said that he would said that he had come to climb to the highest achievement of human life, to experience the bliss, the glory and the brilliant light of liberation. The peasant said, I am poor and unschooled. And I have no hope of enlightenment. However, I hope to see the Dharma in the everyday things and activities of my life. May or may I see the truth in the food I eat, in the work I do. And in the people I encounter. Within six months, the peasant was graced with liberation. The aristocrat is still striving on courageously. So one of the most precious resources you have precious treasures you have is your intention. Are your intention, your dispositions and I hope that you can tap into that treasure house of your own dispositions and enjoy them. Thank you.